Buddhism and Chinese Religions

Joachim Gentz

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> There is a current tradition that Emperor Ming [58-75 CE] dreamed that he saw a tall golden man the top of whose head was glowing. He questioned his group of advisors and one of them said: 'In the West there is a god called Buddha. His body is sixteen *chi* high (3.7 metres or 12 feet),[1] and is the colour of gold.'[2] The Emperor, to discover the true doctrine,[3] sent an envoy to Tianzhu (Northwestern India) to inquire about the Buddha's doctrine, after which paintings and statues [of the Buddha] appeared in the Middle Kingdom.
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> Then Ying, the king of Zhu [a dependent kingdom which he ruled 41-71 CE], began to believe in this path [*c*. 65 CE] and, because of this, the Middle Kingdom received it respectfully. Later on, Emperor Huan [147-167 CE] devoted himself to sacred things and often sacrificed to the Buddha and Laozi.[4] People gradually began to accept it [Buddhism] and, later, they became numerous.[5]

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* The article has greatly benefited from the many meticulous and thoughtful notes by Perry Schmidt-Leukel to whom I am greatly indepted for his work.

[1] For the transcriptions of Futu [*Fu-t'u*] and Fo [*Fo*] for Buddha in the *Hou Hanshu* and *Weilue* see Edwin G. Pulleyblank (1963), p. 213. The text's reference that the Buddha was sixteen *chi* tall (3.7 meters or 12 feet 1 inch), double the usual height for a man, is obviously taken from early Buddhist accounts where this was given as the normal height of the Buddha: "This is the traditional value for the height of the Buddha who is credited as having been twice the size of the men of his time (cf BEFEO, bk. III, p. 392, n. 5)." Translated from Édouard Chavannes (1907), p. 194, n. 2. See also: Erik Zürcher (1972), p. 383, n. 166.

[2] The "golden color" of the Buddha is one of his 32 characteristics (*lakşaňa*). Zürcher (1972), p. 383, n. 168. Note that the text here specifies that his color was that of *huangjin* 'real' or 'actual' gold – see Homer H. Dubs (1938), vol. 1, pp. 111, n. 2 and 175, n. 2.

[3] *shidao* [*shih-tao*] = literally, 'true dao,' 'correct doctrine.'

[4] Laozi = literally, 'Old Master'. Also known as Li Er, the traditional founder of Taoism. He is said by Sima Qian, the great Han historian, to have been born in Chu in the early 6th century BCE. The famous *Book of Daoist Virtue* or the *Daodejing* is traditionally ascribed to him.

[5] Cf. Fan Ye (398-445) ed., *History of the Later Han* (*Houhan shu*) in the annotated translation of John E. Hill: "The Western Regions according to the *Hou Hanshu*." The *Xiyu juan* "Chapter on the Western Regions" from *Hou Hanshu* 88, section 15 "The Kingdom of Tianzhu" (Northwestern India), Second Edition, Sept. 2003. At: http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/hhshu/hou_han_shu.html (20.08.07).

This story of the introduction of Buddhism into China can be found in earlier texts like the *Mouzi* (end of 2nd ct. CE) and in further variations also in many later texts. Apart from that story various legends concerning this introduction can be found in different Chinese sources.[6] Being though the earliest account of the introduction of Buddhism into China in a source regarded as authoritative by the readers of their time, the version of the *Houhan shu* has been the most influential one. Being the representative story for one of the early dynastic histories, the introduction of, belief in, spread and general acceptance of Buddhism in China is explained entirely within a causality driven by imperial agencies. The existence of a quite powerful Buddhism in China in the fifth century is thus given legitimacy through the narrative imagination of an imperial will and control of its growth within Chinese territory in the account of this official *History of the Later Han* (*Houhan shu*). Thus, this version of the story conveys at the same time a generic problem specific to Buddhism in China: its relationship to and position *vis à vis* the grand imperial narrative.

The following article will focus on the relationship of Buddhism to indigenous Chinese religions. I will argue that the relationship of Buddhism to and its impact on Chinese religions is not mainly defined through inter-religious discursive negotiations of its doctrinal contents but rather through cultural and socio-political effects, which are strongly dependent on its relationship to the imperial court. The article will therefore also have to take into account Chinese Buddhism's position within the imperial religious policy and its power relations to religious institutions.

Buddhism's introduction to China

In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE Buddhism was mainly moving within the Ganges valley. In the mid of the third century BCE it started to spread in different directions, southward to Sri Lanka, northwest to Gandhara (Bactria) and Kashmir from where it further moved northward to Central Asia to Parthia, Sogdia, Khotan and Kucha. At the latest in the first century BCE it must have reached China through different routes of the so-called "Silk Road". Other existing travel routes leading through Assam and

[6] Cf. Kenneth Ch'en (1973), pp. 29-34.

upper Burma to Yunnan in southwest China, through Nepal and Tibet and to the south coast via the sea route were used less frequently by Buddhist monks.

Buddhism entered China in a period of political decentralization, social disintegration and intellectual disorientation. As orthodox state ideology Confucianism in the first century CE had lost its integrative power and was split into several schools competing for the right interpretation of the Confucian canon. Since the Confucian texts could not provide a satisfactory basis for the representation and explanation of the new complex social, political and "scientific" reality, Confucianism incorporated basic elements of other doctrines and developed into an unstable synthesis of Legalism, Mohism, Daoism, omenology and correlative cosmology. At the same time Daoism, originally a more philosophically oriented school, took root as a broad religious movement which developed from bottom up into huge and far reaching rebellions. The Han state, unable to cope with the centrifugal powers lost central control in 220 CE and was taken over by several kingdoms which did not bow to any central power anymore. The breakdown of the central state in 220 CE also lead to the collapse of Confucianism as orthodox state doctrine.

The common assumption that Buddhism entered China in an Indian form, which was more philosophical and less religious, more of the non-Mahāyāna branches ("Hīnayāna"), rational and elite has to be refuted from two angles. First, the gradual dissemination of Buddhism into China started from diverse Buddhist centers with rather different forms of Buddhism. As a consequence, the early Buddhisms with which Chinese were confronted did not constitute a coherent religious doctrine or unified system of thought but an irritating multiplicity of different teachings, traditions, rituals and texts, coming out of very different South- and Central-Asian contexts which could not be reconstructed in China.[7]

The early Buddhist communities in China in the first few hundred years after its arrival probably mainly consisted of non-Chinese believers and practitioners, and Buddhism seems to have spread only very slowly to Chinese people. The growing variety of Buddhisms lead from the fourth and fifth century on to recurrent attempts of Chinese Buddhists to reconstruct the whole of Buddhism in their own systems and practices out of which Chinese schools of Buddhism developed. Therefore much of

[7] Cf. Tsukamoto (1985), p. 11-13.

the dynamics of the development of Chinese Buddhism is not caused by a popularization of an Indian elite Buddhism but by the attempt to reconcile the diverging Central Asian forms of Buddhism in China within the landscape of Chinese institutions. Second, archaeological findings have revealed that in contrast to earlier theories Buddhism did not enter China in some pure original Indian "Hīnayāna" form, which was then transformed into more popular forms through the amalgamation with Chinese popular religions in China. The findings rather show that the early Buddhism coming from India via the Silk Road to China already comprised elements, which as "typical Chinese innovations" have been attributed to Chinese Buddhism by earlier scholars. Veneration of stūpas and supernatural Buddhas can be found in early Indian Buddhism as well as the possibility of the transfer of karma between monks and lay people. Moreover, appeasement of local spirits, accumulation of private property magical rituals, invocation of divine powers etc. were not later elements added to an originally pure Indian Buddhism but have been elements of early Indian Buddhist practice from its very beginning.[8] Thus, Buddhism entered China in forms, which might be called popular and religious in opposition to an atheistic, rational elite philosophy, which Western scholarship (and Chinese intellectuals following this scholarship) has constructed as Indian counter pole to Chinese Buddhism since the 19th century.

The archaeological findings also help to understand why this more popular and religious forms of Buddhism were at first not recognized as foreign teachings in China. Indeed they shared many commonalities with Daoism. Both religions repudiated sacrifices in their public rituals and religious exercises and put emphasis on techniques of concentration and meditation, breathing control and specific diets. Buddhists seemed to teach something like the immortality of the soul and its reincarnation in divine Heavens which seemed to be similar to Daoist concepts of a paradise of immortality. Therefore, Buddhism was identified as another Daoist sect in the beginning, and Daoist religious terminology was used throughout to translate Buddhist terms. The Buddha was taken as another god from the Daoist pantheon and associated with gods like Xi Wangmu, the Queenmother of the Western Paradise, and others. The

[8] Cf. Robert H. Sharf (2002), p. 13. For the question of private property owned not only by monasteries but also by individual monks see also John Kieschnick (2003), p. 5, who, like Sharf, refers to the work of Gregory Schopen. Cf. also Jaques Gernet (1995), pp. 66-93 and 153ff. For the question of "magical" devices cf. Edward Hamlin (1988) and Luis O. Gómez (1977).

earliest Buddhist statues in China were found at places of local Daoist cults bearing no evidence of any Buddhist religious contents or functions.[9] Buddhism was conceived as a teaching with which magic powers, immortality and salvation into the Western paradise could be attained, the dogmatic contents of Buddhism were not perceived so that the basic differences were not apprehended.[10] According to Tsukamoto this was one of the factors that aided the acceptance and spread of Buddhism in China.[11] The same happened with other Buddhist cultural imports like ritual practices, temple architecture, clothing, monastic institutions and others, which were adopted without any knowledge of the original Buddhist context and meaning of it. And the fact that the earliest Buddhist texts were not translated in Classical Literary Chinese but very close to the vernacular idiom of the time shows also the social milieu in which it first settled.[12] Thus, Chinese Buddhism in its first stage did not encounter the problem of its own position *vis à vis* indigenous religions because it had not developed any position of its own but consisted rather in different strands of Buddhist traditions, which tried to settle in some form of existence in the Chinese territories.

Among the vast Buddhist literature texts dealing with meditation techniques were translated first because they seemed to deal with similar things as Daoist religion and could be translated and appropriated more easily than others. Accordingly, Buddhist thoughts and terms were first of all translated into the terminology of Daoism and Neodaoism, which changed many basic meanings of the terms and lead to a legacy of Daoist preconceptions within the terminology of Chinese Buddhism that would seriously affect all later developments.[13] The Buddhist concept of emptiness was translated as Daoist nothingness (*wu*), *dharma* was translated as *dao*, *nirvana* as non-action (*wu wei*), the Confucian concept of filial piety and obedience (*xiaoxun*) was taken as translation for the much more general concept of *śīla* (moral). This translation technique became known as "*geyi*" (matching the meaning) and comprised not only singular terms but also systematic operations such as the grouping of several words to numeric units: the five Buddhist precepts for example were identified with the five

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[9] Cf. Walter Sharf (2002) (quoting Wu Hung), p. 22.

[10] Arthur Wright (1971), pp. 32-33.

[11] Cf. Tsukamoto (1985), p. 366.

[12] Cf. Erik Zürcher 1977 and 1991.

[13] Cf. Whalen Lai (1995), pp. 277-281, Demiéville (1956).

Confucian virtues. In Chinese translations of Buddhist texts words which appeared offensive to Confucian moral like kiss or embrace which in the Indian context were gestures of respect and veneration were concealed, the relatively high status of women in Buddhism was changed, the rule, for example, that a man should *support* his wife was changed into the rule that a man should *control* his wife.[14]

Another major problem of translation was the usage of translation terms which where ambiguous and lead to misunderstandings, which could not be solved systematically. The question of the Confucian scholar Li Miao, for example, why the omnipresent and compassionate Buddha was absent (notions he probably took from the Lotus-Sūtra, which was very popular in the fifth century in the South and to which reference is made in the text) and would not save the people through an appearance in a bodily form (a sort of theodicy problem) was answered by two different Buddhist monks in six letters written probably in the Song period (420-476), which are transmitted in the *Hongming ji* (section: Buddhist replies to problems raised) compiled by Sengyou (445–518) in 517. Yet, the correspondence did not lead to any result because the basic Buddhist concepts could not be explained on any common ground.[15] A text like the *Mouzi lihuo lun* written by Chinese Buddhists for Chinese readers in the 2nd century CE reflects central topics of these early discussions and shows didactic attempts to explain Buddhism to a Chinese public.[16] In general, such elements were absorbed which appeared familiar to Chinese tradition. The Buddhist teaching to abandon desire as cause of suffering, for example, was new to the Chinese, and practices such as meditations on different stages of the decomposition of a dead body were unacceptable to Chinese. However, breathing exercises, well known from Daoism, were practiced. The earliest Buddhist texts translated into Chinese were not about the four noble truths, the eightfold path, chain of causation, *nirvāňa* or *anātman*. They were rather about breathing control and concentration exercises – a typical example being the "Sūtra on the Nine Causes of a Sudden Death" (*Jiuheng jing*) in which instructions for proper diet and moral directives are given all of which are not specific Buddhist in the first place.

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[14] Wright (1971), p. 36-37 with reference to Nakamura Hajime, "The Influence of Confucian Ethics on the Chinese Translations of Buddhist Sutras," in: *Sino-Indian Studies: Liebenthal Festschrift*, Santiniketan, 1957, pp. 156-170.

[15] Cf. the translation and analysis of the exchange by Whalen Lai (1979).

[16] Cf. John P. Keenan (1994).

When Buddhism spread in China more and more problems occurred with this sort of cultural translations and the basic cultural differences and contradictions became increasingly obvious and complicated Buddhism's assimilation into the Chinese sphere. Fundamental premises which formed the consensual basis of the various teachings in India such as the supposition of a cycle of rebirth, of karmic dynamics or of a complex structured cosmology implicating various spheres of heavens and hells had to be made plausible in the Chinese context. It was difficult to convince Chinese people so devoted to traditional knowledge, long life and their own ancestors to believe in the Buddhist views that they lived in ignorance, that the world, the perception of the world and even the own person were just illusions which should be abandoned or that one should leave the family to follow the Buddha without caring about parents or ancestors. Chinese scholars who studied a canon of five basic books (which many of them knew by heart) and believed in the superiority of their ancient language and script could hardly be convinced that Buddhism had hundreds of equally important texts which were written in a non-Chinese language – especially if these texts were regarded as not being important in themselves but just served as means for a goal outside of the texts and so, like all other things, were considered to have no reality and truth of their own. In the context of the traditional Chinese worldview in which cultivation of the body played a central role as a value in itself and as a means for salvation people rejected the Buddhist idea that the body was just an illusion, empty and without significance, that in contrast the only goal was the insight and realization of the Buddha nature which in itself was empty, that the ultimate goal was *nirvāňa* which could easily appear as just the opposite of immortality and as the total extinction of the self. People who were used to venerate life, who celebrated spring and the forces of fertility, opposed the Buddhist basic concept that life is suffering and something that should be overcome. Furthermore, Chinese people were not used to give money to people wandering around as a part of their religious obligation. Thus, even if a young Chinese would be convinced of the Buddhist teachings it would yet need another step to cut the hair, leave the family and wander around begging for food and living in celibacy. Since leaving the family and living in celibacy was considered as unfilial in the Chinese Confucian tradition monks would also have to face blames of following an immoral, subversive and parasitic lifestyle with "barbarian" origins, which would be neither productive for the family line nor for the state. Moreover,

there was a problem of language. The Chinese language with its non-inflectional syllables prefers, to say it in a very general way, density, illustrative formulations, comparisons and directness. In opposition, the Indian language likes to use abstract concepts and discourses, applies ornaments, has a highly systematized grammar and systematizes thoughts in a rather mathematical way. Therefore translations, which started already in 165 CE caused problems from the beginnings.

The formation of an indigenized Chinese Buddhism

On account of the above mentioned reasons it took Buddhism until around 300 CE to form something like an own identity and to become an independent force in China and another hundred years until it emancipated itself conceptually as a self conscious religious tradition also through the creation of an own language which then set new standards in the history of Chinese religions.

This indigenization which took place in the forth and fifth century has to be understood against the background of political events which shaped the further development of Buddhism. With the fall of the capital Chang'an in 316 the North of China was occupied by non-Chinese rulers who in short-lived dynasties combated against each other and tried to rule according to the Chinese model. The greatest part of the Chinese elite fled southward and, in view of this defeat, general doubts upon the cultural superiority and strength of the Confucian doctrine further grew and led to an increased interest in Buddhism among the Chinese elite. Buddhism thus disseminated among the elite in the South. In the North, Buddhism was considered by the new foreign rulers as part of the state, its function was to built an ideological basis for political unity.[17] Being foreigners in China a number of Indian Buddhists could identify themselves and cooperate well with the new foreign rulers. Buddhist councilors mainly provided the rulers with magical skills for the control of nature, for military success, for the prediction of the future and so on, we find Buddhists in the North between 220 and 618 CE very much dependent on the ruling house as rain invocators, calendar specialists, doctors and councilors. Buddhist monks substituted

[17] Cf. the very similar case of interrelationship between Buddhism and the state building of the Tangut rulers of the Xia state (1038-1227) as Ruth W. Dunnell (1996) describes it.

the Confucian educated elite, which either had fled into the South or refused to serve the foreign rulers.

This functionalization of Buddhism as a sort of state church in northern China has shaped the tradition of northern Buddhism for many centuries to come. Yet, the Buddhist position from the fifth century on was challenged time and again not so much anymore by Confucians but by Daoists who tried to win the ruler's favor and affection. Buddhists often struggled publicly in highly competitive debates with Daoists for very concrete affairs.[18] In these polemical debates Daoists wrote texts like the *Huahu jing* in which they claimed that Buddhism was actually the teaching of Laozi, which spread to India and now returned in a wrong and misunderstood form.[19] Buddhism in its turn, responded to the criticisms and attacks through treatises in which all the arguments are taken up and refuted in detail. Many of these rather polemical works are collected in the *Hongming ji* and *Guang hongming ji*.[20]

One of the earliest Buddhist responses is the *Zhengwu lun* written by an anonymous writer probably in the early 4th century.[21] This treatise, written in a quasi-dialogical form, quotes the critique of a non-Buddhist (*yiren*/ *tīrthika*) and the Buddhist response, which rectifies the maligner (*zheng wu*). The dispute shows a lack of clear doctrinal distinctions, which is typical for the early profile of the different schools. "The Taoist antagonist cites Buddhist theories in order to disprove Buddhism, and the Buddhist apologist sounds like a Confucian strongly influenced by Taoism."[22] The Buddhist argumentation is more based on the Confucian classics and the *Daode jing* than on Buddhist texts; the theory of fate determined by *Yin* and *Yang* and basic Confucian assumptions and values are all accepted by the Buddhist. As a counter version to the *huahu* theory, Laozi is presented as a disciple of the Buddha. In serious debates between Daoists and Buddhists, which were fought out at court in front of the emperor, similar strategies and arguments are formulated against each other.[23] New scriptures like the *Laozi kaitian jing* and the Buddhist counterpart, the

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[18] Cf. Livia Kohn (1995); Joachim Gentz (2006).

[19] Wang Weicheng (1934); Erik Zürcher (1972), pp. 288–320; Max Deeg (2003), pp. 209–234.

[20] Cf. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (1976).

[21] Cf. Link (1961).

[22] Link (1961), p. 138.

[23] Cf. Mary M. Garrett (1994).

Zhoushu yiji and the *Han faben neizhuan* are forged in order to prove the greater age and thus authority of the own tradition over the other.[24] The tradition of polemical debates between Buddhism and Daoism started in the fifth and sixth century and continued through the Tang.

With the development of an own self-consciousness, Buddhism from the fourth century on began to formulate its own position against Daoism, Chinese tradition and the Chinese state. At the same time it started also to found its own Chinese schools through creating an own Chinese Buddhist terminology. From 401 CE on, after the great translator Kumarajiva had arrived in the northern capital Chang'an, the translation of Buddhist text reached a new level of professionalism. New translation techniques, which focused more on Sanskrit terms, phonetics and even syntax, were developed. Huge translation teams were formed to discuss and control translations in a more inter-subjective and scientific manner. Instead of using the traditional Daoist terms for translation a new Chinese Buddhist terminology based on Sanskrit linguistic features including syntax and phonology of the Indian language was created in order to cling as close to the original texts as possible.

Buddhism in the North was very much supported by the foreign rulers of the Northern Dynasties who, on the one hand, financed the construction of monasteries as well as of great complexes of cave temples such as Yungang in Shanxi in which several of the huge Buddha statues embody physiognomies of some of the Northern Wei rulers. On the other hand, these rulers invented new systems of temple control and for the first time appointed clerical officers who served the interest of the state. The first great persecutions of Buddhism (446-452 and 574-578) occurred also under their rule.

In the South the situation was somehow reversed. Many of the educated Confucian scholars and sons of rich aristocratic families who did not get a position in the much smaller Southern territory, which the Chinese court now had to rule, turned to Buddhism. Buddhism, which in the South in contrast to the North was independent from the state, therefore developed as an alternative intellectual institution that challenged the official scholarly elite and was often used by aristocratic and intellectual fractions as an institutional frame in which opposition against the court was formed. Building on the educated pure conversation (*qingtan*) tradition of Neo-Daoism (the so

[24] Tang Yongtong (1983), p. 387.

called "Study of the Dark" *xuanxue*) central topics of the earlier Neodaoist debate on being and non-being, on wisdom, emotions and sageness were now discussed within a new emerging elite Buddhist context and connected to Buddhist topics such as emptiness or wisdom. Answers and theories relating to Chinese traditional questions were developed on the basis of Buddhist texts, which were much greater in number than the available Daoist texts and for their sheer number and richness in sophisticated literary and philosophical expressions were highly attractive for many members of the intellectual elite of the southern aristocracy.[25] Starting in the years between 290 and 320 CE Buddhism thus reacted to Chinese concepts, translated Buddhist concepts with Chinese Neodaoist terms and began to develop a specific Chinese tinge. The support of the court and of aristocratic clans who acted as patrons of a still rather independent Buddhism gave rise to a wealthy Southern Buddhism with ca. 1,700 monasteries and 80,000 monks and nuns around the year 400 and an emerging religious policy, by which the court tried to win Buddhists to act as advisers and officials in secular matters and to restrict the power of the growing clergy. As in the North, in the South an indigenous Chinese Buddhist tradition started to develop.[26]

From the fifth century, starting in the North, the new self confidence of Buddhism as an indigenous Chinese teaching was also reflected in the development of its strong economic power which not only had a far reaching impact on Chinese material culture[27] but also began to develop into a fiscal burden for the Chinese economy.[28] In the North, as already mentioned, rulers and aristocrats sponsored great works of Buddhist art like the huge grottoes in Yungang and Longmen which were built between the 5th and 8th centuries and demonstrated the power and wealth not only of Buddhism but first of all of the ruler sponsors. In Yungang 40,000 workers worked for 50 years (especially between 460 and 490 CE) and created ca. 51,000 statues. After the Wei rulers moved their capital to Luoyang the grottoes of Longmen continued the Yungang project. With more than 100,000 statues carved in stone these grottoes reflect a much longer building process (ca. 480-900 CE). The site reflects a shift from Śākyamuni veneration towards Maitreya, Amitābha and Guanyin, from the

[25] Cf. Tsukamoto (1985), p. 402.

[26] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1972), p. 75.

[27] Cf. John Kieschnick (2003).

[28] Cf. Jaques Gernet (1995), p. 14-25.

historical Buddha to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from which concrete help and support for salvation in the Western Paradise was expected. Whereas the statues in the early grottoes in Yungang with their Central- and South-Asian physiognomies still reflect Buddhism as a non-Chinese religion, with strict and rigid faces expressing detachment from the world, the later statues are much more human in their expression, smaller, more colorful and dynamic. The face expressions appear more friendly, gracious and compassionate and thus reflect a religion more down-to-earth and related to the common people than the monastic and ascetic ideal presented in the earlier grottoes. Buddhism in the North began to become very obvious in public life and Buddhist institutions became big and very rich. By now, Buddhist monasteries were not only places of education, teaching and religious practice but also economic centers of grain storage, treasuries, religious and political power for which they were often severely criticized and, as a consequence, also attacked by the state.[29] In the years 713–803 the biggest Buddha of the world, the 71 meters high future Buddha Maitreya, was carved out of the stone at Leshan. Built in order to expel a monster deemed to live at that edge of the river and to cause flooding and boat accidents the huge statue shows how much and what sort of power was ascribed to the mere material representation of the body of the Buddha.

The immunity of Buddhist monasteries against imperial elimination, however, was dependent on their status. In general three different types of Buddhist institutions can be distinguished which according to their different sponsors enjoyed different degrees of immunity.

(1) The imperial sponsored large monasteries received their names through imperial order and were subsidized by regular donations. They were accepted as official places of Buddha worship, the officially ordained monks and nuns were selected by imperial institutions and controlled by an imperial appointed clergy. These privileged monasteries also served the state through their ritual practice.[30]

(2) Monasteries founded and supported by the local elite who were also responsible for the control of these institutions. These monasteries did not enjoy an official status, but were mostly tolerated by the court. Whether or

[29] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 15.

[30] Cf. Gernet (1995), pp. 4, 303-306.

not their existence fell victim to the regular imperial anti-religious campaigns depended on the power and influence of the local clans. Since the main aim of the founding of these monasteries was the gain of merit and receiving of blessing the main interest of the locals lay in the continuous maintenance of the religious service.[31] Powerful clans or monks therefore permanently exerted pressure on the court to achieve official approval for these monasteries and official ordination for the residing monks and nuns.

(3) Small Buddhist temples erected in villages by the village community and financed by donations and offerings given in exchange to their religious services. These institutions grew everywhere and were hardly controllable in every respect; innumerable anonymous variants of Buddhism developed here as local mixtures between different sorts of Buddhist and local popular religious traditions. Their existence depended mainly on the degree of control that local magistrates were able to exercise, and during anti-religious campaigns thousands of these small temples and shrines were destroyed or turned into secular buildings to be rebuilt and reconverted later on.

In Falin's (572–640) *Bianzheng lun* (T 2110) written in 626, these three sorts of monasteries are differentiated and listed with the following numbers: During the Northern Wei Dynasty (386–534) existed 47 large state monasteries, 839 monasteries of princes, dukes, great families, nobles of the five ranks and marquises and more than 30,000 monasteries built by commoners. During the Chen Dynasty (557–589) existed 17 new state monasteries and 68 monasteries built by officials among a total of 1,232 monasteries. The rest of 1,147 religious sites was built by private people.[32] Buddhist monks could be found at the imperial court as well as on the countryside, in huge monastic communities as well as as individuals in the villages and woods. This also explains the enormous variety and diversity of Buddhist teachings, schools and different features of Buddhism in China, which strongly depended on local characteristics. Further, it explains the extremely different ways Chinese Buddhism built relationships to other religious traditions. On the local level Buddhism would seek pragmatic solutions to integrate itself into social and economic structures,

[31] Cf. John Kieschnick (2003), pp. 185-199.

[32] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 4, 16, Ch'en (1972), pp. 203-204.

through cooperating with representatives of the local elite or other religious traditions or through transforming itself into quite different religious forms.[33] Big monastic organizations, in contrast, as centers of control and representatives of the Buddhist tradition were much more likely to insist in differences and to risk conflicts with imperial or other religious institutions. Large monasteries had up to 300 monks or nuns, average monasteries 20-50 monks or nuns plus 10-20 novices, small temples 2-3 or they were organized by local temple committees.[34] Many of those monks or nuns did not dwell in the monasteries, the affiliation was a purely formal one, which allowed them official registration and on that basis exempted them from tax payment, military and labor services. On the other hand many monks and nuns were not registered because ordination numbers were officially limited to a certain amount. Thus most of the monks and nuns ordained in the regular large state ordinations which took place once in every several years mostly were not new monks and their ordination did not add to the number of overall monks in the empire, it rather converted a large number of existing but unregistered monks and nuns into a new official status.[35] The percentage of (officially registered) Buddhist monks and nuns in relation to the (officially registered) population is relatively constant throughout times at around 0.5-1%. In times of financial shortages (like, for example between 534 and 574 or around 830 CE) the state would sell ordination certificates to rich peasants who by that means would evade taxation and labor services so that the number of ordained monks would rise and the state would acquire money in the short term. However, official persecutions (such as the big persecutions in the years 574-577 and 845) would bring the numbers considerably down again. Gernet has convincingly demonstrated the economic reasons for the rise of ordination numbers as well as for the major persecutions, which also determined the position and relationship of Buddhism towards other religious traditions in China.[36]

Clashes, tensions and their motives

[33] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 250.

[34] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 9.

[35] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 10.

[36] Cf. Gernet (1995), p. 11-12.

Many of the reasons given for official legitimatizations of the persecutions were based not so much on economic but on political considerations. General criticisms directed against religious traditions, like being immoral, rebellious, causing public disorder, deceiving the people, causing fear, confusion and sickness, cheat or waste money, practice illicit and licentious sex, intermingle and mix different groups, genders, men and gods and different social levels, being not in accordance with the classics or the official pantheon, following millenarian concepts and practicing wrong rites,[37] were also applied to Buddhism. Since these political arguments were mostly effective in causing the state to take political actions against religious traditions they were frequently used in the polemical debates between the religious traditions and used by Daoists against Buddhism in the same way as Buddhists used them against Daoism. Criticisms directed specifically against Buddhism further included economic arguments such as that they illegally evade taxation, are not productive (neither in their production for the economy of the state [agriculture or commerce] nor in corvée or military defense, nor in the production of children [which again are necessary for further production, corvée and military defense]), collect property and funds and waste highly valuable resources, engage in commercial competition with worldly businessmen. Additionally, political arguments were advanced such as that Buddhists do not accept state authority and undermine public order, illegally become monks, nuns and clerics, and cultural arguments such as that Buddhism represents a barbarian culture, language and religion, violates the rules of filial piety and propriety and is therefore antisocial and highly immoral.[38] As part of the many religious laws special laws applied to Buddhism against: public sūtra readings in marketplaces, collection of alms, explanation of the fruits of salvation, collection of money.

Most of the critique or the laws, however, do not refer to doctrinal contents. Authors on Ming Qing Sectarianism like Ter Haar, Seiwert and others have already noticed the absence of theoretical discussion and doctrinal arguments between the representatives of the Chinese state and religious movements.[39] Patricia Ebrey has

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[37] Cf. Jan Jacob Maria de Groot (1963); Rolf A. Stein (1979); Patricia Ebrey (1993); Judith Magee Boltz (1993), p. 244; Hubert Michael Seiwert and Ma Xisha (2003), pp. 56-59 and 99, C.K. Yang (1967), pp. 194-208.

[38] Cf. Kenneth Ch'en (1952); Stanley Weinstein (1987), p. 8; Yang (1967), pp. 199-205 Hubert Michael Seiwert and Ma Xisha (2003), p. 99 and 157.

[39] Hubert Michael Seiwert and Ma Xisha (2003), pp. 99-101, 140, 163.

shown how little the state responded to the critique of the educated elite, which was often based on doctrinal analysis.[40] Multiple examples from Chinese religious history, transmitted especially in the polemical debates between the teachings[41] also show that there was among the educated elite a lot of critique from all sides of religious doctrine and practice, which focused on doctrinal contents such as the ultimate truth, the reality of being, the omnipresence of the Buddha, the materiality of world and body or the immortality of the soul. However, the response of the state in most cases is different. The state mostly gives structures and does not discuss contents, it reacts to symbols, not to doctrinal faith. As long as the aesthetic side, the orthopraxy in correct rites and performative actions, are in accord with the laws and codices we find no interventions.[42] Watson and Ebrey have shown that it was the use of ambiguous symbols, which made unified culture traditions possible in China.[43] Many imperial pronouncements are very clear in their focus on political matters and not on matters of content.[44] Critique in most cases does not concern doctrinal principles but rather excessive practices. As a consequence prohibitions did not last for long and the distinction between what was permitted and what was allowed was not clear cut and always subject to variations.[45] Since the main interest of the state was a political one it handled religious matters only in a political and not in a doctrinal way.[46] There are, of course, exceptions. Since religious policy strongly depended on individual rulers we have examples of particular rulers (like Liang Wudi r. 502-549, Sui Wendi r. 589-604 or Wu Zetian r. 684-704) who were believers of Buddhism and therefore based their decisions in matters of religious policy on doctrinal arguments. But even these arguments had to be formulated in a very general way and within a frame of a fixed established institutional control of religion.[47]

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[40] Ebrey (1993), pp. 209–239.

[41] See for an introduction into that genre and the translation and analysis of one of the important texts Livia Kohn (1995) and Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (1976).

[42] James L. Watson (1987), pp. 292–324, p. 323.

[43] Watson (1987), p. 324, Ebrey (1993), pp. 228–229.

[44] See as an example an edict dating from 1724 cited in Yang (1967), p. 194.

[45] Stein (1979), pp. 77–81.

[46] Cf. Eichhorn pp. 194-206, 244-245.

[47] Cf. Eichhorn pp. 194-195, 241-143; for Sui Wendi see Wright (1957), pp. 93-104

This is somehow comprehensible for the state with its interest in political stability; however, within the tradition of inter-religious polemics we find the same phenomenon. The contents of the inter-religious debates mostly concern cultural, ritual and moral questions. Doctrinal discussions are rare and in most cases restricted to followers of the same doctrine. Only very few doctrinal topics are mentioned in inter-religious debates.[48] Such topics are, for example, the question of the origin of Buddhism in the *huahu*–debate (i.e. whether Buddhism depended on Daoism or *vice versa*),[49] the struggle concerning the relation of church and state in the question of whether Buddhist should bow before the emperor or not,[50] the long debate on the immortality of the soul[51] and the related question about the cause of destiny in the debate about karma or Heavenly Mandate (*tianming*),[52] which touched upon the question of the relation of human responsibility and divine providence. Related to the Buddha's order and mediation of salvation this discussion also contains a sort of theodicy-question in questioning his power, ability and willingness to alleviate suffering and to bring about salvation.[53] Important for the development of Chinese religious discourse have been the questions relating to the two truths (*erdi lun*), on the original nothingness (*ben wu*), on the middle path (*zhong dao*), on salvation, on the Tathāgatagarbha (*rulai zang*) or Buddha nature (*foxing*), on holiness or enlightenment (*bodhi*), on gradual or sudden enlightenment (*dun wu*) etc.[54] Although those questions were only discussed among Buddhists within Buddhist circles and did not become themes of public debates many of them reflected and continued debates which had been developed in the Confucian and Daoist traditions earlier on.[55] They always follow the central question of whether the debated doctrinal position fits into the Confucian state system, which, like the Confucian classics, was always taken for

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[48] Walter Liebenthal (1952b), p. 121. Walter Liebenthal (1955), pp. 60-83.

[49] Cf. Wang Weicheng (1934); Erik Zürcher (1972), pp. 288–320; Max Deeg (2003).

[50] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1959); Kenneth Ch'en (1954).

[51] Cf. Walter Liebenthal (1952a); Kenneth Ch'en (1952), pp. 173–178.

[52] Cf. Kenneth Ch'en (1952), pp. 178–183; Arthur E. Link (1961), pp. 154–160.

[53] Peter Gregory (1995), p. 110; Whalen Lai (1972); Link (1961), pp. 147–150.

[54] Walter Liebenthal (1952b), p. 122–128; Walter Liebenthal (1955), pp. 60–83.

[55] Walter Liebenthal (1952b), p. 119; Walter Liebenthal (1955); Robert Sharf (2002), Introduction, p. 11.

granted.[56] The identity of different truths is a common topic systematized especially in the exegetic traditions of the quite different Confucian classics in the Confucian tradition,[57] the discussion on original nothingness started in the context of Neo-Daoist philosophy in commentaries on the *Laozi*,[58] the theme of the middle path is a central topic in Confucian philosophy and is especially explicit in the canonical text of the "Doctrine of the Mean (*Zhong Yong*)",[59] the debate on the Buddha nature is prepared in the Confucian debate on human nature,[60] the question on holiness is anticipated in the earlier discussion about the true sage[61] and the discussion on sudden or gradual insight can also be traced back to different approaches towards self-cultivation and self-perfection within the Confucian and Daoist traditions.[62] Despite their importance for the further doctrinal development of Chinese religions, all in all the doctrinal discussions within the debate between the established Chinese religions are not crucial for the institutional development of Chinese religions.[63] Gernet has argued that the overestimation of the influence of these debates on the social, economic or institutional development of Chinese religions, which can be found in Western literature, is based on a projection of European conditions of doctrinal discourse into the Chinese context.[64]

Integrative efforts

The early integration of different Buddhist approaches in a Chinese conceptual framework may first of all be understood as an attempt of various Chinese Buddhist communities to create a consistent Chinese version of the different Central and South Asian Buddhist teachings, comprehensible also within the frame of Chinese common language and culture. Three interrelated factors may have caused the development of

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[56] Livia Kohn (1995), p. 19; Walter Liebenthal (1952a), p. 331.

[57] Cf. Michael Nylan (2001), Introduction, pp. 1-71.

[58] Cf. Rudolf Wagner (2003), pp. 123-124.

[59] Cf. Andrew Plaks (2003).

[60] Cf. Angus Graham (1990).

[61] Cf. Wagner (2003), pp. 177-199.

[62] Cf. Peter N. Gregory (1987), Introduction.

[63] Walter Liebenthal (1952b), p. 120.

[64] Jaques Gernet (1995), Introduction, p. XVI.

what can be called Southern Chinese Buddhist perspectives, which started with the study of Buddhist Wisdom texts (*Prajñāpāramitā*), translated already in the 3rd and 4th centuries: an obvious similarity between the doctrine of the emptiness of all things and certain Neodaoist concepts of nothingness suggested an identification of these two quite distinct doctrines.[65] Yet, the chaotic, diffuse and often very cryptic transmission of this Buddhist doctrine necessitated a reformulation and systematization in comprehensible Chinese terminology in the Chinese context, which due to its darkness left sufficient space for different translations. This Neodaoist terminology of the early very free translations of Buddhist texts caused associations and understandings, which started to form indigenous Buddhist traditions in China.

In the 4th and 5th century these terminological, philosophical and intellectual approaches came to be criticized by representatives of the new Buddhist centers in the middle provinces at Xiangyang, Jiangling and Lushan which are associated with the ministry of the two leading figures Daoan (312–385) and his main disciple Huiyuan (334-416).[66] Daoan was among the first to formulate guidelines for translators, in which he systematically defined five sort of text deviations and three difficulties.[67] This new focus on philological matters, which also led to a rejection of the usage of Daoist concepts for Buddhist terms and which were influential in the school of the great translator Kumarajiva,[68] was a result of his constant fear that his text interpretations and commentaries might not exactly correspond to the actual intention of the scriptures.[69] With Daoan starts a new tradition of Chinese Buddhism, which was highly conscious about the differences between the indigenous Chinese and the Indian Buddhist teachings.[70] This new hermeneutic approach of Daoan developed in politically independent areas under the rule of local rulers and led to new Buddhist traditions, which were also more independent from the mainline discourses of the

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[65] Cf. Tsukamoto (1985), p. 369.

[66] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1972), chap. 4.

[67] Cf. Franz-Joseph Meier (1972), pp. 42–44.

[68] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1972), p. 203.

[69] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1972), p. 187.

[70] See the clear position, which is formulated by his disiciple Huiyuan in a letter to Huan Xuan in 403:

"Furthermore, the *ka□āya* is no court attire, nor is the *pātra* a vessel appropriate for ancestral temples. Just as the civil and the military have different forms, so the foreign and the Chinese should not mix" in: Tsukamoto (1985), p. 841.

Southern and Northern courts and more creative in moulding their own intellectual trends. On the basis of this conscious creation of an "original Indian" Buddhism in China they combined parts from the northern traditions like veneration, meditation, breathing and magical-religious practices as well as monastery rules with parts from southern Buddhism such as literary traditions, fine arts and philosophical speculations. Since not only Daoan and Huiyuan but most of the Buddhist converts had a strong background in Daoist and/or Confucian texts,[71] they used at the same time elements from the Confucian and Daoist traditions in a very conscious way by treating them not as identical but as analogous elements. The biography of Huiyuan reports:

> When he was twenty-four (357 AD), he once attended a sermon where a guest who listened to the explanation (of the scripture) raised objection against the concept of transcendent Truth (*shi xiang*) (as explained by Tao-an). The debate lasted some time, but the (opponent's) doubt and lack of understanding still increased. Then Hui-yüan mentioned a (corresponding) concept taken from *Chuang-tzu* by way of analogy whereupon the deluded (opponent) reached a clear understanding (of the truth). Tao-an henceforward especially allowed Hui-yüan to keep the secular literature (for this purpose).[72]

This passage shows in which way teachings of other religious traditions were used as useful but clearly distinct expedients of support. The integration of the Northern and Southern traditions of Buddhism from the 6th century on led to the most creative and innovative phase of Chinese Buddhism in the Sui (581–613) and Tang Dynasties (618-907). A number of Chinese school traditions (*zong*) are established in this time. Some of them, like the Sanlun or the Faxiang schools, which were Chinese scholastic versions of the Indian schools of Madhyamaka or Yogācarā were rather short-lived. Others like the Tiantai, the Huayan, the Jingtu or the Chan schools were able to survive, mainly because they accomplished an integration of Chinese traditional elements in three main ways.

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[71] Cf. Paul Demiéville (1956), p. 24-27.

[72] Cf. Erik Zürcher (1972), p. 241 translating from the *Gaoseng zhuan* chap. 6.

(1) As a reaction to the plurality of scriptures and teachings theories were developed primarily by the Tiantai and Huayan traditions, which tried to explain how all the diverse Indian Buddhist scriptures and schools could be part of the teaching of the Buddha. Traditional Chinese classification methods were used which systematically integrated all the other major schools (and sometimes even the Daoist and Confucian traditions) into an encompassing hierarchical order. In the Buddhist context these systematizations were called *panjiao* and three major criteria for classification were used in these *panjiao* systems to constitute and justify an order in which the own school ranked at the top of the systematic order, a) chronological classification according to periods, b) classification according to the Buddha's teaching methods and c) classification according to doctrinal contents.[73] Although different criteria are used to create different rankings of Buddhist schools the basic methodology is taken over from older Chinese traditions of correlative classifications of the world, which were used in the Confucian tradition to legitimize the own school's ruling position within a great variety of philosophies and religions in China and to create political unity among them. The unifying approach was based on the assumption that all these differences were mere variants of an underlying unity, an ideal which could never be achieved but only be approached and was represented in the purest form by the school ranked highest in the system. This continuation of the old Confucian strategy of unification is expressed clearly when Zongmi (780–841), honored as the fifth patriarch of the Huayan scholastic tradition and of the Heze-line of Southern Chan and author of the doctrinal classification treatise *Yuanren lun* (*Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*), in order to legitimize his own approach refers to the best known Confucian phrase from the Confucian classic, the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*): „together they return to the one source" (*tong gui yi yuan*).[74] Another Confucian strategy of Zongmi's argumentation can be found in his

[73] Cf. Enichi Ōchō (1981). Ōchō especially looks for early forms of this system. In this excellent article he mainly concentrates on a specific *panjiao* model. Cf. also Liu Ming-wood (1981) and (1988). Another *panjiao* system, which also integrates Confucianism and Daoism is developed in Zongmi's (780-841) *Yuanren lun*. For an analysis and translation see Peter N. Gregory (1995), pp. 4–8, pp. 80-104, cf. also Shih Heng-ching (1992), p. 14.

[74] Cf. *Yuanren lun*, Taisho tripitika T45n1886, 710b4, transl. in Gregory (1995), p. 189.

correlation of the *panjiao* stages with a cosmogonic process through which the order of Buddhist teachings becomes equivalent to the order of the cosmos.[75]

(2) The Pure Land (*jingtu*) school integrated devotional practices from Chinese popular religions. Its main emphasis lies on Buddha worship and salvation in the Western paradise, a notion, which was partly influenced by earlier Chinese religious traditions such as the worship of Xi Wangmu, the Queen Mother of the West.[76]

(3) Daoist elements were integrated in the Chan (jap. Zen) tradition, which is often traced back to the Daoist philosophical work *Zhuangzi* being full of the wit and the vivid unorthodox forms of a particular (in the West well known) part of the Chan tradition,[77] but also to the figure of Confucius as he is represented in the Analects (*Lunyu*) appearing as a precursor of later Chan masters.[78] The main features, which are taken over into the Chan tradition are, firstly, usage of paradox language in order to undermine the limitations of linguistic expression. This linguistic practice is based on a particular philosophy of language, which considers language as an insufficient tool to express deeper insights and higher truths wherefore it is used in specific coded, hidden and dark ways by sages who want to transmit their insights to later generations. This philosophy finds expression in such early texts as the *Laozi* and the *Yijing* and has also reflections in the Confucian *Analects* (*Lunyu*) and the early exegetical tradition on the Confucian and Daoist classics. Secondly, skeptic, relativist, iconoclastic and deconstructivist strategies related to fixed concepts, definitions, values and rituals. Thirdly, emphasis of a flux of free spontaneity as opposed to controlled modes and expressions of behavior, argument and thought. And fourthly, focus on meditation, mysticism and emptiness.

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[75] Cf. Gregory (1995), pp. 21-24.

[76] Cf. Michael Loewe (1994), pp. 86-126.

[77] Cf. Livia Knaul (1986), Wang Youru (2003).

[78] Cf. Rudolf G. Wagner (1991), pp. 455–464; also R. G. Wagner (2004). See also Yoshinori (1999), p. xv.

In the *panjiao* scheme of his *Yuanren lun* Zongmi poses Confucian and Daoist teachings on the first and lowest stage of his hierarchical *panjiao* order. Zongmi explains this positioning through an analysis of the teachings, which draws on a series of the earlier polemical arguments of inter-religious debates, tries, however, not to be polemical himself when he writes in his preface:

> Confucius, Lao-tzu, and Śākyamuni were consummate sages who, in accord with the times and in response to beings, made different paths in setting up their teachings. The inner and outer [teachings] complement one another, together benefiting the people. As for promoting the myriad [moral and religious] practices, clarifying cause and effect from beginning to end, exhaustively investigating the myriad phenomena, and elucidating the full scope of birth and arising – even though these are all the intention of the sages, there are still provisional and ultimate [explanations]. The two teachings are just provisional, whereas Buddhism includes both provisional and ultimate. Since encouraging the myriad practices, admonishing against evil, and promoting good contribute in common to order, the three teachings should all be followed and practiced. If it be a matter of investigating the myriad phenomena, fathoming principle, realizing the nature, and reaching the original source, then Buddhism alone constitutes the definitive answer.[79]

In his first chapter on the "deluded attachments" of those who study Confucianism and Daoism Zongmi then goes on to criticize that the essential meaning of these two teachings "merely lies in establishing [virtuous] conduct based on this bodily existence and does not lie in thoroughly investigating the ultimate source of this bodily existence […]", they thus "do not realize that they are provisional and cling to them as ultimate".[80] He further criticizes their clinging to the unchangeable Way as the source for everything, which, according to Zongmi, means that things as they are cannot be changed (i.e. everything would be determined by the eternal source) and the teachings

[79] Cf. Gregory (1995), p. 44.

[80] Cf. Gregory (1995), p. 45.

accordingly would be of no use. He also attacks the concept of spontaneity criticizing that this would invalidate the laws of causes and conditions. He tries to show that it contradicts other assumptions within their own teachings, which are based on causal explanations, and asks again where the use of the teachings lies if the principles of causes and conditions are given up.

Another critique is directed against the Primal Pneuma (*yuanqi*), which in his view cannot explain how the spirit of a human being comes into being, and how the spirit of human beings would have a sense for likes and dislikes from birth on. He further asks how on the basis of the theory that spirits would come into being spontaneously with the birth of human beings and after their death would disperse in the same sudden way, then the spirits of the dead could be explained? Zongmi's next critique is directed against the theory of the Mandate of Heaven. Why, does he ask, "are the impoverished many and the wealthy few", "those suffering disaster many and those enjoying bounty few? If the appointment of many and few lies in heaven, why is heaven not fair?"[81] He develops that further into a very basic question of theodicy: "Since all these proceed from heaven, heaven thus makes the immoral prosper while bringing the moral to grief."[82] Thus, Confucianism and Daoism are acknowledged as benefiting teachings of "consummate sages" who "in accord with the times and in response to beings, made different paths in setting up their teachings",[83] which serve the well-being of the people, admonish against evil, promote good and contribute in common to order and should therefore be followed and practiced. Buddhism, however, starts where they end and proceeds from these superficial and provisional to the more profound and ultimate teachings. If it therefore "be a matter of investigating the myriad phenomena, fathoming principle, realizing the nature, and reaching the original source, then Buddhism alone constitutes the definitive answer."[84]

The systematical integration of different traditions seems to be one of the main features of Chinese Buddhism. Apart from the *panjiao* classification methodology

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[81] Cf. Gregory (1995), p. 47.

[82] Cf. Gregory (1995), p. 47. See for a parallel in the Indian Buddhist critique directed against Hinduist conceptions of gods Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2006), pp. 123-141.

[83] Cf. Zongmi as translated in Gregory (1995), p. 44.

[84] Cf. Zongmi as translated in Gregory (1995), p. 44.

other strategies of unification of diversity were emphasized in the Chinese Buddhist traditions.

A central concept of explaining doctrinal contradictions in different Buddhist texts and of conforming different strands of Buddhism in China was the further theoretical development of Nāgārjuna's doctrine of two truths (*er di*),[85] as we find it for example in the treatise on the two truths (*Jie erdi yi lingzhi*) of prince Zhaoming of the Liang dynasty (502–557).[86] According to the Chinese theory of the two truths, the highest truth (*paramārtha*, *zhen*) lies beyond language,[87] while the truth that can be expressed (*saṇvṛti*, *su*) refers to and is part of the worldly reality.[88] This binary division into something true, essential, unchanging etc. and into something temporarily, functional, changing etc. is developed into a long series of analytical pairs of opposition and used in diverse discussions throughout the ages.[89] Zongmi uses this binary division in his differentiation of temporal/provisional (*quan*) and conclusive/definite (*shi*) teachings.[90] Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623) applies this structure in regard to the teachings of Daoism and Confucianism in the well known pair of the oppositions of „*ti*" (essence) and „*yong* " (function).[91] Lu Longqi (1630–1693) attacks Wang Yangming arguing that he takes the actual (*shi*) of Chan Buddhism but follows the Confucian namings (*ming*).[92] In the treatise on the two truths prince Zhao of the Liang dynasty (502-557) correlates the true (*zhen*) with the truth of the highest meaning (*diyi yidi*) and with the concrete (*shi*) of equality (*pingdeng*) as well as

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[85] Cf. *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* (*Zhong lun*), chap. 24.

[86] This text is contained in the *Guang hongming ji* (Taishō 52) juan 21, cf. Sibu congkan Ming kanben repr., Shanghai: Shangwu, 1935, vol. 2, pp. 292–297. For an analysis and translation cf. Whalen Lai (1978).

[87] „*Parama*" was read in Chinese as the "first" (*diyi*) and as root (*ben*) in contrast to the multiplicity of the secondary things. Two aspects (*satya*) were taken as two stages of development. Cf. Walter Liebenthal (1955), p. 63, see also Robert Sharf (2002), pp. 63–65.

[88] Cf. Paul L. Swanson (1989).

[89] On the basis of the Daoist philosophical pair of oppositions of being (*you*) and non-being (*wu*), activity (*wei*) and non-activity (*wuwei*), concrete (*shi*) and emptiness (*xu*) and the one (*yi*) and the multiple (*wanwu*) the Indian oppositional structure of the two truths was translated into the Daoist realm of material things so that the first truth was set on the side of being (*you*), non-activity (*wuwei*), concrete (*shi*) and the one (*yi*). This repositioning attributed the character of matter to it which was not as prominent in the Indian traditions in which the theory of two truths mostly referred to epistemological and discursive questions and not so much to ontological questions of materiality and existence. Cf. Lai (1978), pp. 341–342.

[90] Cf. *Yuanren lun*, Gregory (1995), p. 73; Rainer Hoffmann and Hu Qiuhua (1997), pp. 49–50.

[91] Hsu Sung-peng (1979), p. 151.

[92] Lu Longqi, "Xueshu bian (shang)" in: *Lu Jiashu xiansheng wenji*, *Congshu jicheng* 2475, p. 11.

with the unattainable and unborn. On the side of the second truth he places the common (*su*), the worldly *(shi*), the collected manifold (*ji*), the differentiated, which moves, changes and has beginning and end. He then quotes the *Mahāparinirvāňa Sūtra* with the correlation of the highest truth with the insight (*zhi*) of those who have left the world (*chushi ren*) and the lower truth with the insight of the worldly people (*shi ren*).[93] Thus, the multiplicity of the (Buddhist) doctrines, including even the four noble truths, is a result of a worldly perspective which is unable to grasp the one and equal first truth of the unity of all these teachings. In the Indian context this was meant by Nāgārjuna and others as an epistemological problem, in the Chinese context this was often interpreted within the ontological dichotomy of being (*you*) and non-being (*wu*) assuming that beyond the lower worldly reality (not truth) would be another higher and ultimate reality.

The Buddhist concept of "expedient means" (*upāya*, *fangbian*) as a pedagogical technique of instruction which is rather central to many Chinese traditions especially those focusing on the Lotus Sutra perfectly fits to this sort of a pluralistic understanding of truth which we find also in the doctrine of the two truths as explained above. According to the theory of "expedient means" the Buddha has explained one and the same truth in different forms to different people according to their level of understanding in order to help them in the most efficient way on their path to enlightenment. This technique is mentioned and discussed in several major Mahāyāna-sutras as one of the central messages.[94] The multiplicity and contradictions of the Buddhist doctrine could on the basis of the two truths model and the technique of "expedient means" very well be related to some supposedly unified doctrine.

Accordingly, one of the main innovations of these new emerging Chinese schools was the special emphasis on the Indian concept of the one and unified Buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha / buddhadhātu*, *rulaizang* / *foxing*) in all sentient beings, which was now understood as something substantial, which lies in every person and thus unifies the diversity of beings on a very fundamental conceptual level. Two aspects of this innovation are worth to look at more analytically. First, the Buddha nature, on the one hand, relates to the early concept of human nature (*xing*), which forms the center of one of the main debates in Confucian philosophy from the third

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[93] Cf. *Jie erdi yi lingzhi*, *Guang Hongming ji* (cf. above fn.), p. 292, Lai (1978), pp. 343–344.

[94] For *upāya* in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa sūtra* see Richard B. Mather (1968), p. 66.

century BCE onward and is directly related to the other central debate on sageness and wisdom.[95] On the other hand, it again provides some unifying center within the diversity of sentient beings. Second, the substantialization of abstract Indian concepts into things is another central feature of the sinification of Buddhism. In general the Indian Buddhist concepts of emptiness and illusion were transformed into Chinese concepts of substance, which were concrete, illustrative and real. This in turn led to the development of a specific Buddhist material culture in China, which Kieschnick, in my view convincingly, has divided into the three aspects of "sacred power", "symbolism" and "merit".[96]

Although scholars like Faure, Foulk and Sharf have shown the importance of the aspect of sacred power of material things also for the later Chan tradition which then also merged with Pure Land traditions,[97] an important impulse to the early Chan tradition was the iconoclastic momentum which turned against any substantialization be it in theory, conceptualization and thought, in the study of texts or in religious practice and institutions in general. This new momentum was based on a radical understanding of an all-present universal Buddha nature which was accessible through other means than the study of texts and the practice of rituals, namely introspection and a direct and spontaneous transmission from mind to mind between master and disciple. Meditation (*chan*) techniques and the transmission line of Chan masters as counter tradition to Confucian genealogies therefore played an important role in the Chan tradition.[98] Bernard Faure in his critical work on the Chan tradition has shown how much of the concept of immediate enlightenment in the Chan tradition has to be understood as rhetoric[99] and how important the practice of rituals and text study remained also for the Southern Chan-traditions.[100] However, with a new emphasis on different paths to enlightenment which focused strongly on common everyday things and actions the Chan tradition set forth the Huayan and Pure Land approaches with

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[95] Cf. Angus C. Graham (1990), pp. 59-65.

[96] The fourth category of "accidentals and incidentals" is not so important to us here. Cf. John Kieschnick (2003).

[97] Cf. Robert H. Sharf (1999); T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf (1993-1994); Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (2001); Bernard Faure (1996).

[98] Cf. John Jorgensen (1987). For the construction of Chan tradition see Bernard Faure (1988) and (1993).

[99] Cf. Bernard Faure (1991).

[100] Cf. Bernard Faure (2003).

their concentration on paradoxical language[101] and their focus on the material world as a blessed Buddha world and further opened the Buddhist tradition to Daoist concepts of paradox, non-logical and counter-expected techniques of behaving and teaching through which insight into truths beyond language and reasoning should be achieved. Like the Daoist tradition the Chan tradition through these means also expressed opposition against the other established religious (incl. Buddhist), political and moral institutions; and the great founding patriarch of the Chan tradition, Bodhidharma, and many of the later Chan patriarchs were constructed through the collection of anecdotes and biographical literature as deviant and oppositional symbols of resistance against common habits and established worldly institutions.[102]

Chinese Buddhism after the 9th century

By the 9th and 10th centuries all of the major Chinese schools of Buddhism were established. Buddhism and Daoism were both established as orthodoxies and despite their rivalry in regard to imperial support and privileges they shared a common interest in maintaining the political system and the social structures which supported them and of which they had become an intrinsic part themselves. As such they supported the state on the local level and opposed popular cults and religious movements outside the state controlled orthodoxy.[103] The narrative goes that the great persecution of Buddhism in 845 by emperor Wuzong (260,000 monks and nuns were ordered to become lay and 4,600 temples and 40,000 shrines destroyed) brought an end to the prospering of Buddhism and to many Buddhist schools in China, that Chinese Buddhism has never recovered from this persecution and that only two schools, Chan and Pure Land, remained due to their independency of central institutions and scriptures and their main focus on religious practice. However, the concurrent growth of the Confucian influence to the court, of which Han Yu's (768-824) anti-Buddhist pamphlets may be taken as an early radical articulation, combined with a veneration of Laozi to whom the Tang imperial family (because of their

[101] Cf. Dale S. Wright (1982), pp. 335-336.

[102] Cf. Bernard Faure (1986).

[103] Cf. Ma Xinsha and Hubert Seiwert (2003), p. 161.

identical surname Li) had a special relationship,[104] may be the main reasons why the major institutions of elite Buddhism were not supported any longer by the Chinese state. Albert Welter has shown how Buddhism despite efforts of highly respected representatives like Zanning (910-1001) from Song time on was further on not able to play a role in the elite intellectual discourse because it was denied a place in the new intellectual order of early Song which started to define its own identity through a turn towards native values and original sources identified with a Confucian civil and literary culture (*wen*).[105]

This, however, did not lead to a decline either in cultural or in quantitative terms as has been stated so often. The important ongoing contribution of Buddhism to Chinese intellectual and aesthetic culture has only recently been acknowledged by Chinese Studies scholars.[106] Contrary to the standard narrative, we rather should talk of a transformation of Buddhism in China, which even continued to grow in new forms of popular mass organizations forming entirely new syncretistic forms of Chinese popular Buddhism.[107] In combination with messianic and millenarian ideas these organizations especially in Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) times led to political and rebellious movements, which were persecuted harshly by the Chinese state and led to a religious policy, which in many aspects still is in use today.[108]

From the 9th and 10th century on Chinese Buddhism, mainly due to the new dominance of Confucianism, changed in different respects. First, its status was lowered in relation to the growing power of state Confucianism. Second, its relation to the other religions changed because syncretistic forms of Buddhism became dominant in China, which incorporated indigenous religious traditions. Third, in order to keep an own identity *vis à vis* the other established religions Confucianism and Daoism on the one hand and within a process of an increasing syncretism in the own traditions on the other hand, Buddhism started to construct its own school traditions through a new

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[104] Especially the first two Tang emperors who nearly outlawed Buddhism and then again Wenzong (826-840) and especially Wuzong (840-846) who suppressed Buddhism. Cf. Stanley Weinstein (1987), pp. 5-27 and 106-136.

[105] Cf. Albert Welter (1999).

[106] Cf. for example the excellent contribution of Marsha Weidner (2001).

[107] Cf. Daniel L. Overmyer (1976), (1999a), (1999b), Yü Chün-fang (1993), p. 4.

[108] Cf. De Groot (1963); Weller (1982); Hubert Seiwert and Ma Xinsha (2003); Barend J. Ter Haar (1992).

historiography from Song times (960-1279) on.[109] Fourth, following the revival of Buddhist monasticism in the 7th century[110] new forms of organization and rules were defined in new codices of monastic rules.[111] Fifth, Buddhist forms of popular religion emerged with own scriptures, rites and doctrines.[112]

As a response to the reformation of Confucianism into an inward turning Song Neo-Confucianism which incorporated a number of Buddhist concepts into the interpretation of the canonical Confucian texts, a similar inner turn in the Daoist alchemical tradition and the new creation of the heavily Chan-influenced Quanzhen school of Daoism, the claim of the "harmonious unity of the three teachings" (Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism), "*sanjiao heyi*" started to become increasingly used from Song time on. Imperial edicts and religious texts claim a harmonious unity between the three teachings, which suggests an equality between the religions. Yet, if we closely examine the texts, which make use of this new paradigm we find no real attempt at equalizing the religions in a pluralistic sense. Even Lin Zhaoen (1517–1598) who is often depicted as a true egalist,[113] is not balanced and shows clear preferences. All *sanjiao*-texts operate from a central perspective to which the three religious traditions are related either in a coordinative mode if they are related to different functions which complement each other into a greater whole, or in a hierarchical mode when they are envisioned as different stages of one and the same overall truth. They are, however, never understood as equal. And even the coordinative mode is always constructed from a position, which either lies above the traditions if it lies outside (like the imperial one). Or it gives preference to one of the traditions as we find it in the writings of great *sanjiao* representatives like Qisong (d. 1072), Liu Mi (Song or Yuan), Wang Ji (1498–1583), Lin Zhaoen (1517–1598), Li Zhi (1527–1602), Jiao Hong (1540–1620) or Hanshan Deqing (1546-1623).[114] The Buddhist perspective does not show any specific profile in this genre of *sanjiao* texts. Like the other traditions it continues to argue for the superiority of the preferred own tradition by

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[109] Cf. Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (1982); Jan Yün-hua (1964).

[110] Cf. Huaiyu Chen (2006).

[111] See the excellent introductory first part of Yifa Zongze (2002). See also Theodore Griffith Foulk (1993).

[112] Cf. Daniel L. Overmyer (1976).

[113] Cf. Judith Berling (1980), Introduction, p. 60.

[114] For a further discussion of the *sanjiao* concept cf. Joachim Gentz (2006).

using the same arguments which had basically been developed in the internal inter-religious polemical debates, in the *panjiao*-schemes and in the public *sanjiao*-debates at court. The *sanjiao*-texts reflect the coagulation of a debate, which out of lively negotiations after hundreds of years has developed a number of stereotypes, which define and thereby secure the three teachings as parts of a threefold orthodoxy, which aims at consolidating its achieved position and is not threatened anymore in its existence.

Within this secured frame a further important shift of Buddhism nevertheless takes place in Ming (1368-1644) times through a development of the Confucian tradition towards the self and the mind culminating in Wang Yangmings (1472–1529) Confucianism, which opposes the orthodoxy of the established Neo-Confucianism by further turning inward, further turning toward practice and further borrowing from Buddhism. "Left wing" disciples of Wang Yangming even opened Confucianism further to Buddhism in the 16th century through mixing elements from both traditions so that both traditions became widely accepted among the Confucianist educated gentry society from the 16th century on.[115] At the same time Buddhists like Yunqi Zhuhong (1535-1615) developed new syncretistic modes of Buddhism, which focused more on practice than doctrine, addressed laymen and made a conscious effort to combine different Buddhist schools and to approach a Confucian tradition, which at that time on the one hand approximated and absorbed Buddhist traditions, on the other hand also laid emphasis on practical learning.[116]

Around the mid of the 19th century Chinese Buddhism was nearly destroyed in its main areas of influence in the lower Yangzi delta through the devastating consequences of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1862) which caused over 20 million dead and 600 destroyed cities. The "Christian" Taiping rebels killed Buddhist clerics and destroyed temples and scriptures to a vast extent and thereby weakened Buddhism in China considerably. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries Buddhism regained strength through reforms which positioned it as a doctrine which with its "atheistic philosophical rationalism" and international context appeared to be well compatible with the expectations and legal demands that the political reformers in China had in relation to the traditional religions which were mostly seen as non-scientific and

[115] Cf. Timothy Brook (1993), esp. pp. 54-88.

[116] Cf. Yü Chün-fang (1981).

superstitious.[117] Since then it has been, like most other Chinese religions, developing very much in accordance with the changing political requests of the ruling parties in mainland China.[118]

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[117] Cf. Vincent Goossaert (2006); Gabriele Goldfuss (2001); Gotelind Müller-Saini (1993).

[118] Cf. Stephen Feuchtwang (1989), pp. 43-68. In Taiwan the situation is quite different. We find huge Buddhist organizations, which operate with modern management methods such as fund raising, the founding and establishing of modern high schools and universities, which are attractive to many young intellectuals who are not convinced of the rapid westernization of Taiwan. Taiwanese Buddhism is permanently present in at least two television channels and in radio programs and is very active in the establishment of international relationships with other Buddhist organizations also in mainland China. Cf. the impressing *Year Book of Buddhist Colleges and Buddhist Institutes in Taiwan* (1st Issue), edited by the Chung-Hwa Institute of Buddhist Studies, Lee Chih-fu, Taipei, 2002.

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